



**Adjusting to a non-cosmopolitan destination: identifying the coping
strategies of SIEs living in Porto**

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Biographical information

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Abstract

Self-initiated expatriates have become an important source of global talent. In the last decade, research has addressed their characterization, the motives to expatriate and career paths. However, not much is known about their adjustment difficulties and how they cope with them, particularly in a non-cosmopolitan destination. To address this research gap, this study explores the motives and experiences lived by a sample of SIEs in Porto, Portugal, and their adjustment process including anticipatory and in-country adjustment. Further, it identifies the coping strategies used, which influence their level of adjustment in the host-country.

The results highlight the common difficulties and challenging situations SIEs have to deal with when moving, the negative impressions and perceived cultural differences. It also presents how SIEs deal with difficult situations overcoming the language barrier, cultural distance and lack of knowledge on how things work, and the impact it has on their life satisfaction in Porto. Moreover, it was possible to identify eight coping strategies as being the more recurrent among the self-initiated expatriates living in Porto when dealing with difficulties.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by illustrating the experiences and challenges SIEs have when moving to less cosmopolitan cities and by identifying the coping strategies commonly used to minimize uncertainty and help adjust.

Key words: Self-Initiated Expatriates, Adjustment, Coping Strategies, cultural differences, non-cosmopolitan destination.

Resumo

Os Expatriados Voluntários (*Self-Initiated expatriates*) tornaram-se numa importante fonte de mão-de-obra e a pesquisa, com o passar dos anos, tem-se focado na sua caracterização, motivos para expatriar e percursos profissionais. No entanto, pouco se conhece sobre as suas dificuldades de ajustamento sociocultural e como lidam com as mesmas, particularmente em destinos não cosmopolitas. Este estudo serviu para explorar as experiências vividas por uma amostra de expatriados voluntários (SIEs) no Porto, Portugal, e o processo de ajustamento dos mesmos, abrangendo o ajustamento antecipatório e o ajustamento ao país, para identificar as estratégias de *coping* que podem influenciar o nível de ajustamento no país anfitrião.

Os resultados destacam as dificuldades e desafios comuns que os expatriados voluntários (SIEs) têm que ultrapassar quando chegam, as impressões negativas e as diferenças culturais percebidas. O estudo também revela como os expatriados voluntários (SIEs) lidam com situações difíceis superando a barreira da língua, a distância cultural e a falta de conhecimento de como funcionam as coisas, e o impacto que isso tem na sua satisfação com a vida no Porto. Adicionalmente, foi possível identificar oito estratégias de *coping* como as mais recorrentes entre os expatriados voluntários que vivem no Porto quando lidam com as dificuldades.

No geral, este estudo contribui para a literatura ao ilustrar as experiências e desafios que os expatriados voluntários (SIEs) enfrentam quando se deslocam para cidades menos cosmopolitas e ao identificar as estratégias de *coping* frequentemente usadas para minimizar o impacto da incerteza e ajudar ao ajustamento.

Palavras-chave: Expatriados voluntários, Ajustamento sociocultural, Estratégias de *coping*, Diferenças culturais, Destinos não cosmopolitas.

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1. Introduction

In the late twentieth century cross-border mobility started gaining attention due to global economic changes, being seen as a way to achieve new market goals. As a result, since the late 1980's, research about expatriation has been on the rise due to the potential perceived in the skilled human capital moving internationally. The assumed edge international workers could bring to the business was promising and led to an interest on the population willing to expatriate.

In 1997, a seminal paper from Inkson, Arthur, Pringle and Barry proposed two models to approach the international work experience: Expatriate Assignment (EA) and Overseas Experience (OE), thus distinguishing the assignments of corporate initiate from the remaining. This study described for the first time the population currently referred to as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), as people who are eager to relocate without having any organizational sponsorship to pursue their professional and personal development expectations for an undetermined period of time (McKenna & Richardson, 2007). Since the publication of Inkson et al. (1997), the idea of expatriates not being all the same opened a window for new research on identifying who they are and what characteristics make them different.

The possibility of finding highly skilled professionals operating internationally by choice and willing to commit locally by adding their experience, knowledge and know-how, have made SIEs to become an increasingly important part of the global labor force (Ceric & Crawford, 2015). The flexibility, self-confidence, and willingness to adapt identified in most SIEs (Inkson et al., 1997) have become very attractive to organizations that sought to translate this personal initiative into proactive new business strategies and opportunities - a distinct approach to deal with problems (Hippler & Maïke, 2016)

According to Doherty (2013) review, a total of 49 articles were published from 1996 to 2011 specifically using the term "*self-initiated expatriates*". Most identified the characteristics of SIEs, the motivational drivers and career paths among others related topics.

SIEs adjustment emerged in the three levels of Doherty (2013) analysis: individual, organizational and contextual. Cross-cultural adjustment, defined as *“the process and end state of being familiar and comfortable while interacting in the host culture”* (Black & Mendenhall, 1990, p. 124) is considered to be a much studied topic in the international assignments literature, referring mostly to the challenges faced by corporate expatriates. Yet, less is known about the challenges of adjusting to a different culture faced by SIEs, the specific stressors involved in relocating without corporate support and the specificities of coping with the new situation.

Despite pursuing an overseas experience voluntarily (Inkson et al., 1997), SIEs are responsible for their own career development and face many challenges when starting a new job at the destination, such as dealing with stereotypes, maintaining their motivation, understanding organizational culture, and considering the insights of professional relationships (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen & Bolino 2012). When referring to a boundaryless career, mobility is not limited to the physical facet, but it also involves a psychological dimension (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) related with the ability to make transitions across the mobility from what is known to what is new.

Coping refers to how individuals approach difficulties and daily problems right on the spot; how they react to them. The development of individual resources and mechanisms to deal with stressful situations can lead to the acquisition of long-term competencies for managing stress (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2016). The way SIEs react to and deal with the adversity and the new challenges of moving abroad, such as cultural differences, language, family openness, finding job opportunities, among others, might impact in the adjustment process.

The difficulties of adjusting have been well documented for international students (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), corporate expatriates (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Shaffer & Luk, 2005; Black, 1988; Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003) as well as academics self-initiating international displacements (Froese, 2012; Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Selmer & Lauring, 2010). Empirical evidence are mainly from SIEs from developed countries, such as New Zealand, Finland, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, China and Japan (Doherty, 2013), while less is known from SIEs

relocating to less cosmopolitan destinations, such as Porto (Portugal). In these destinations, SIEs are more likely to be strained by the lack of social support and local language difficulties.

In Portugal, according to SEF's – Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras – there were 395.195 registered foreigners by 2014, whom were living in the country with a residence card. Most were aged between 20 and 39 years old and 83.5% were active in the labor market. However, consistent with the OECD International Migration Database (2015), Portugal is registered as the country with the second least inflow of permanent immigrants. Despite this ranking, the number of SIEs arriving in Porto has been increasing and not much is known about them. To this end, this research aims to explore the experiences of SIEs in Porto and the coping strategies used to ease their local adjustment.

The present study provides a review of what previous research has identified as being the main characteristics of self-initiated expatriates and what are the main attributes that make them different from other international assignees. In addition, it reviews the literature on coping. It also addresses the Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) model of cross-cultural adjustment with the purpose of understanding how this framework, developed for corporate expatriates, can help understand the degree of adjustment of SIEs. Following, a description of the empirical study is presented, including the methodology and the data collection procedures. The next section presents the main results, which are discussed in the final section. The document ends by presenting the limitations and recommendations for future research, as well as the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Self-initiated expatriation

While the phenomena of self-initiating an international assignment is not new, the research interest for the concept of self-initiated expatriation is recent, dating back from the last 20 years. According to Dorsch, Suutari and Brewster (2013), self-initiated expatriates have been in the employment market for many years but only recently there has been an interest for studying them aside from assigned expatriates. Earlier studies concerning work mobility focused the migration issues and its effect on economy, while the literature on international human resources management (IHRM) emphasized the multinational strategies to deal with foreigner workers, disregarding this group. Self-initiated expatriates were either allocated to the “*assigned expatriate*” category or to the “*locally employed*” category, so that their international background was generally overlooked.

In 1997, a seminal paper from Inkson, Arthur, Pringle and Barry distinguished the Expatriate Assignments (EA) from the Overseas Experiences (OE) and described, for the first time, the population now referred to as self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). Since then, other authors drew the attention to their characteristics and recently Ceric and Crawford (2015) summarized the distinctions that have been identified throughout the years. The initiative coming from the individual of leaving the home country is one of the main characteristics of self-initiated expatriates (Inkson et al., 1997), where the personal motivation plays a central role on the decision of moving and might be consider higher than the motivation of assigned expatriates due to the fact that the initiative for going to work abroad comes from de organization, and even the expatriates may have personal motives for saying yes, those motives may be attached to having the company support and benefits that come with accepting the mission (Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

Since self-initiated expatriation was associated to different forms of international work experiences, it is likely that the concept appears overlapped with terms such as assigned or corporate expatriation and migration. Andresen, Bergdolt and Margenfeld (2013) define assigned expatriate as an employee sent to work abroad by the organization who usually benefits from having an expatriate contract, while self-initiated expatriates are defined as

individuals with no sponsorship and who decide to work abroad most probably getting a local contract. Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) also present differences between both regarding the clarity concerning the period of time working abroad, having Assigned Expatriates a pre-determined duration for the assignment and the guaranty of going back and receiving some benefits after having completed the mission. On the other hand, Self-Initiated Expatriates cannot have a clear date for going back to the home country, nor having any clear knowledge about where the resources for the relocation will come from.

In addition, migration mainly differs from self-initiated expatriation in terms of the duration of the mobility. According to the United Nations (1998) a migrant can be defined as a person who geographically moves its life to another country of residency and base the center of life in the new place. Al Ariss (2010) adds to the period of mobility that the terms related to migration are commonly used in relation to the origin and destination of the mobility, being normally used when referring to the mobility from a not very developed country to a more developed one, not relating this issue to self-initiated expatriates.

Cerdin and Selmer (2014) proposed a definition of SIEs that differentiates them from other international movers based on a group of four criteria identified as common denominator in SIEs: (1) *self-initiated international relocation* as being the initiators of the decision and lacking support for the relocation from an organization; (2) *regular employment (intentions)* despite career barriers, the intention to obtain a regular job that not only may help to enhance their career but also allows to fund their living; (3) *intentions of a temporary stay* differentiating from immigrants not having a permanent time perspective and seeing the host-country as a temporary home; and (4) *skilled/professional qualifications* as to pursue a global oriented career.

In addition, being personal initiative one of the principal attributes of SIEs, Richardson and McKenna (2002) identified and distinguished the main drivers to go abroad, which were group into four metaphors. *Explorer* refers to the desire to discover the world, getting to know other cultures and living in different countries, which appears to be more related to personal fulfillment than to an exclusive professional interest. *Refugee* points out the tiredness in home-country for both personal and professional matters, which leads to look

for a way out to find something different. *Mercenary* allude to financial motives pursuing the idea of earning more, being money the driver to mobility, which tends to be associated with the opportunities given by the destination choice. Finally, *architects* are associated to career building motives expecting the expatriation to improve their career development.

Despite the motivational drivers concerning SIEs relocation, resources become an important factor when making the expatriation effective (Hippler & Maike, 2016); time to gather information about the destination and the legal requirements for a long-term stay, and money to fund the expatriation, usually coming from personal savings and casual earnings.

2.2 Cross-cultural adjustment

The importance that international management gained in the late 70s, due to the economic changes the world was going through, started attracting attention to the importance of cross-cultural interaction. Work-related international assignments were becoming more common, from short-term business trips for negotiating projects with foreign companies to corporate expatriation (Bonache, 2005)

Cultural differences became a major concern when considering the mission and its success, which depended on how expatriate managers would deal with adjusting to the foreign environment. More attention was brought to this issue when companies realized the cost of unsuccessful international assignments, whether because of an early return or because of a poor performance. Even though researchers started focusing on studying adjustment and effectiveness of expatriates in international assignments, most of them were mainly non-theoretical and anecdotal (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991), and only until 1991 a theoretical framework was proposed. The most common definition for cross-cultural adjustment in the literature is the one presented by Black and Mendenhall (1990) as “*the process and end state of being familiar and comfortable while interacting in the host culture*” (p. 124).

In 1991, Black and colleagues (Black et al., 1991) proposed the first comprehensive model for cross-cultural adjustment. The model was revised in 1999 to include and

distinguish the anticipatory adjustment from the adjustment at destination. Presuming that the adjustment to a previous international assignment would make a following adjustment easier the authors listed a number of individual, job and organizational factors that could ease the process.

Individual factors considered to be helpful in anticipatory adjustment were related to a) training in advance regarding preparing for the change, informing themselves about the climate, language, and culture; b) previous experience working abroad or with accepting international assignments related to work; and c) accurate expectations regarding the assignment. Organizational factors referred mainly to the training and support the company could provide, usually to the assignee and family, in order to prepare for them for the entire experience of moving.

Regarding in-country adjustment, the authors proposed four categories of predictors that could affect the degree of adjustment. Individual factors, referring to the characteristics and the skills of the individual, which can be helpful to understand and identify the appropriate ways to behave and react when interacting with locals and establishing communication channels. Job factors, all of them related to the new role during the assignment, such as job clarity about what to expect from the assignment, job discretion regarding predictable behavior, and dealing with the novelty and uncertainty of the new job. Organizational factors include training and understanding of the culture novelty as well as network support through corporate information and social support from the supervisor and locals. And finally, non-work factors, all of them related to the expatriate's personal life where family and friends have a substantial impact on the state of mind and satisfaction, and also on how the expatriate feels about the destination culture and community he is now part of.

These factors differently contribute to expatriation adjustment depending on the specificities of the assignment, as well as on the personal characteristics and job-related issues. In addition, the authors stated that cross-cultural adjustment is a multifaceted process that includes three distinct dimensions required to the feeling of being adjusted. The dimensions are: i) adjustment to work; ii) adjustment to interacting with host nationals; and iii) adjustment to the general environment. Work adjustment refers to the comfort the worker

has regarding the requirements and expected performance on the job at the destination; Interaction adjustment, concerns the comfort socializing with host nationals in and outside work, and general environment adjustment, related to the adjustment to the foreign living conditions not work-related, such as transportation, cost of living, food, language, among others (Black et al., 1991). Another assumption from this model is that each dimension can be affected separately, so that an expatriate can have a higher degree of work adjustment than interaction or general adjustment (or vice versa), due to the fact that some predictors (e.g. host social support) may have a higher influence on one of the dimensions of adjustment than others.

2.3 Coping

Coping in general has been widely studied since the late 1970's. According to Coyne and Racioppo (2000) until 1998 around 25,000 articles had used *coping* as a keyword, a number that by now has increased considerably. Relatedly, several definitions of coping have been presented (Latack & Havlovic, 1992); one of the most used in literature has been the one proposed by Coyne, Aldwin and Lazarus (1981) stating that coping refers to "*efforts, both cognitive and behavioral, to manage environmental and internal demands and conflicts affecting an individual that tax or exceed a person's resources*". Overall, academics agree that coping refers both to how people deal with stressful situations and conditions and how the way they react influence, for the better or for the worse, the outcomes of a particular situation (Skinner, Edge, Altman & Sherwood, 2003).

Despite the amount of studies published on this topic there is a lack of consensus on how to measure or structure coping (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen & Wadsworth, 2001; Edwards, 1988; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Latack & Havlovic, 1992; Skinner et al., 2003). For instance, after analyzing 100 earlier studies Skinner et al. (2003) identified around 400 different ways of coping, finding that some of them referred to the same attributes due to overlapping lists and there was little consistency in the instruments across the different studies. Yet, two-sided coping categories are usually mentioned

throughout the related literature: (1) problem-focused vs. emotion-focused approach and avoidance; and (2) primary control vs. secondary control coping.

The fundamental problem in coping research has been the identification of the core categories (Skinner et al., 2003), mainly because coping is not a unidimensional behavior but depends on different perceptions, cognitions and behaviors (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978).

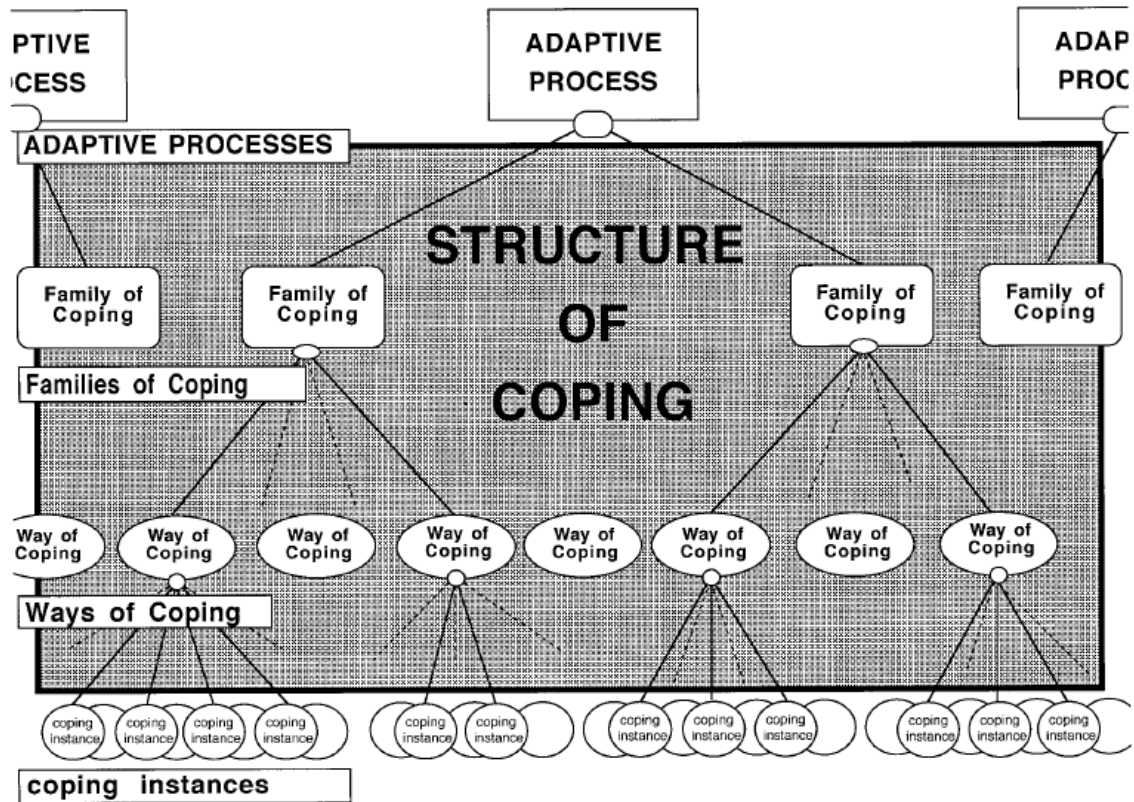
In their research, Skinner et al. (2003) analyzed how studies in coping had been made until then and identified some of the most common problems. Regarding ways of coping, the authors identified four main conceptual problems: a) lack of clarity in category definitions, which led to ambiguous interpretations; b) problems of comprehensiveness, due to the unclear definitions and differences between categories; c) problems determining functional homogeneity and functional distinctiveness; and d) flexibility in categories. In addition, when referring to the higher order categories, they concluded that the number of distinctions proposed was small and repetitive. The first set of distinctions identified referred to the functions of coping, being one of the most common one the problem-focused vs. emotion-focused coping. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1980), functions in coping refer to the purposes of the coping strategy, which are uninformative about the effects or consequences of a coping strategy. Thus, authors argue that ways of coping should not be classified by function, mainly because they are not mutually exclusive, since a problem-focused approach can help an individual deal with emotions, as well as an emotion-focused tactic can help an individual to solve a problem.

A second set of distinctions identified another high order category of coping - the topological feature, being the most recurrent the approach vs. avoidance strategy, usually referring to the individual's preference to be closer to the stressful situation or to withdraw and be shielded from the information (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Despite these attempts Skinner et al. (2003) argued that no single topological distinction should be used as a higher order category because the combination of them could actually result in multiple dimensions, since there are different ways and methods to implement and action. Distinctions such as approach and avoidance can be complementary in an individual's process when dealing with a stressful event instead of antagonistic (Skinner et al., 2003).

The third and last distinction analyzed was the identification of action types, referring not just to a particular behavior but also taking into consideration the attention, goals and others emotions. The most common distinction among type refers to primary versus secondary control, the first one aiming to influence the objective events and the context, and the second one focusing on the self and using coping to maximize individuals fit to deal with the stressful conditions (Rudolph, Dennig & Weisz, 1995). Once again, Skinner et al. (2003) questioned these distinctions due to the lack of clarity in defining the features of each category, and their non-mutual exclusivity, noting that the efforts to control the context might influence the self and vice versa focusing.

Overall, Skinner et al. (2003) proposed a structure of coping distinguishing four conceptualizing levels, as illustrated in Figure 1. The bottom level - *coping instances* - refers to the countless responses people have when dealing with stressful situations in a daily basis. Two intermediate levels in the structure were defined, a lower order category labeled - *ways of coping* - referring to mutually exclusive and clear action types which can classify the instances of coping, and a higher order category named - *families of coping* - representing the multidimensional and multifunctional nature of different ways of coping. In the top of the structure - *adaptive processes* - can be found denoting that a larger process will result from coping generating more established responses after certain stimulus.

Figure 1



A hierarchical conceptualization of the structure of coping. From Skinner, Edge, Altman and Sherwood, 2003, p.218

Based on earlier studies and scales (Skinner & Wellborn, 1994, 1997; Skinner & Edge, 2002; Steinberg, Skinner & Young, 2002), the system proposed by Skinner et al. (2003) presents 12 families of higher order action types organized around three sets of concerns that trigger human response: Competence, Relatedness, and Autonomy. As shown in Figure 2, every set contains four families of coping, organized according to the level of distress each concern creates, meaning challenges/opportunities and threats, and the target of coping each concern would involve, meaning self and context.

Figure 2

	RELATEDNESS		COMPETENCE		AUTONOMY	
	CHALLENGES to SELF		CHALLENGES to SELF		CHALLENGES to SELF	
Behavior	Self-reliance Shouldering	Support seeking Comfort seeking Help seeking	Problem solving Strategizing	Information seeking Study Observe	Accommodation Cooperation Concession Committed compliance	Negotiation Compromise
	Self-soothing Accept responsibility Concern for others	Trust	Encouragement Determination Confidence	Interest Optimism Hope	Acceptance	Blamelessness Taking other's perspective
	Protection Shielding Positive self-talk	Appreciation	Repair Mastery	Prevention Planning	Commitment Conviction Endorsement	Decision making Goal setting Priority setting
	THREATS to SELF		THREATS to SELF		THREATS to SELF	
Emotion	Delegation Dependency Demanding Clinging Pestering	Isolation Withdrawal Freeze	Helplessness Random attempts Flailing Falling down the stairs	Escape Flight Avoidance	Submission Perseveration Rigidity Unresponsiveness	Opposition Aggression
	Self-pity Whining Shame	Loneliness Desolation Yearning	Self-doubt Discouragement Guilt	Pessimism Despair Fear	Self-blame Disgust	Projection Blame others Venting Explosion Anger
	Abandonment Irritation	Cutting off	Panic Confusion	Procrastination	Obsession Rumination Intrusive thoughts	Reactance Revenge
Orientation	THREATS to CONTEXT		THREATS to CONTEXT		THREATS to CONTEXT	

Twelve families of coping. Skinner, Edge, Altman & Sherwood, 2003, p.239

As it is shown in figure 2 in bold letters, the families of coping, concerning relatedness, are: self-reliance, support seeking, delegation, isolation, whereas the families for competence are problem-solving, information seeking, helplessness, and escape. The coping for autonomy, includes: accommodation, negotiation, submission and opposition. As part of these families, the authors related the ways of coping to different tendencies to act, such as: emotion, behavior and orientation although they do not limit them to that, stating that the 12 families were designed to allow for a wide variety of coping strategies. Figure 3 presents their definitions.

Figure 3

Coping strategies	Definitions
Self-reliance	Promote constructive self's reactions to stressors and contribute to the construction of resources such as Confidence, perceived control, and personal trust. (Skinner & Wellborn, 1994)
Support seeking	Support seeking family is based on an action tendency that is organized around the urge or desire to come into contact with an attachment figure and includes active attempts to signal and reach the support provider as well as a characteristic emotion (yearning) and an attentional focus away from the stressor and toward the support provider. (Skinner, Edge, Altman & Sherwood, 2003, p. 238)
Problem Solving	Active, constructive, and approach strategy aiming to change the stressful situation or changing the self's perspective on it. (Skinner et al., 2003)
Information seeking	"Information seeking refers to attempts to learn more about a stressful situation or condition, including its course, causes, consequences, and meanings as well as strategies for intervention and remediation". (Skinner et al., 2003, p. 242)
Accommodation	"Adjusting personal preferences to situational constraints" (Brandstadter & Renner, 1990, p. 58).
Negotiation	"Negotiation refers to active attempts to work out a compromise between the priorities of the individual and the constraints of the situation". (Skinner et al., 2003, p. 242)
Delegation	Delegation and included lower order categories such as dependency, maladaptive help seeking, complaining, whining, and self-pity. (Skinner & Wellborn, 1994)
Isolation	Self-Isolation and social isolation encompass avoiding others, concealment, stoicism, and emotional withdrawal. (Skinner et al., 2003)
Helplessness	"Helplessness refers to a set of actions organized around giving up or the relinquishment of control. Lower order ways of coping include passivity, confusion, cognitive interference or exhaustion, dejection, and pessimism". (Skinner et al., 2003, p. 242)
Escape	"includes efforts to disengage or stay away from the stressful transaction. ... it includes lower order ways of coping, such as cognitive avoidance, avoidant actions, denial, and wishful thinking". (Skinner et al., 2003, p. 242)
Submission	"Refers to a passive and repetitive focus on the negative and damaging features of a stressful transaction; it includes lower order ways of coping, such as intrusive thoughts, negative thinking, catastrophizing, anxiety amplification, self-blame, and fear". (Skinner et al., 2003, p. 242)
Opposition	Opposition describes a family that includes lower order ways of coping such as projection, reactance, anger, aggression, discharge, venting, and blaming

	of others. It is controversial as a higher order category because of its overlap with symptoms of psychopathology, specifically externalizing behaviors. (Skinner et al., 2003)
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Definition of coping strategies. Adapted from Skinner, Edge, Altman and Sherwood, 2003.

Furthermore, Skinner et al. (2003) put forward that understanding the structure of coping can help understand the adaptive processes. Throughout evolution, human kind have become keener to identify and respond to threats, not just as an impulse but as a structured chain of actions to avoid danger; so the response to stress stopped being just a reaction and start becoming a way to improve the comfort of the individual with the environment.

According to Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) coping in international assignments is based on the strategies expatriates use not only to overcome but also to reduce and manage the internal and environmental demands. In spite of the outcomes, coping focuses on the individuals' efforts to manage the stressful situations. The behavior expatriates have when abroad tended to be more proactive in terms of change coming up with a variety of coping strategies to balance the uncertainty and challenges of the new destination (Feldman & Thompson, 1993). Furthermore, context and cultural differences appear to influence the coping strategies used by expatriates due to their effectiveness in the host-country compared to the effectiveness in the home-country (Feldman & Thomas, 1992). Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) found that not all coping strategies have a direct effect on positive outcomes. They also found that while the effectiveness of coping strategies does influence work and non-work adjustment of expatriates, the country of the assignment and the cultural proximity or dissimilarity may influence adjustment even more.

2.4 Research questions

The main objective of this study is to identify the coping strategies associated to the adjustment process of self-initiated expatriates living in a non-cosmopolitan destination. In detail, this study explores the motives and experiences lived by a sample of SIEs in Porto, and their adjustment process including anticipatory and in-country adjustment. Further, it identifies the coping strategies used, which might influence their level of adjustment in the host-country.

Overall the research questions are:

1. What are the main reasons why SIEs decided to come to Porto?
2. How was the SIEs' adjustment process when moving to Porto?
3. What are the SIEs' intentions as to returning home?
4. What are the competencies required to adjust to the host-country?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research approach

This study was designed to use a qualitative approach in order to best follow the aim of the research, willing to obtain the insights, attitudes, opinions and behaviors (Creswell, 2007), inquiring into the day-to-day life experiences of SIEs. Qualitative research, as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), not only locates the observer in the world as also intends to interpret and make sense of the meanings given by individuals in their natural settings. For this purpose, semi-structure interviews were considered the best approach for collecting data, allowing interviewees to share stories and understandings based on their personal experience.

Given the study aims, the interviews were target to SIEs living in Porto, for which a purposeful convenience sample was sought. Four selection criteria were considered: a) to be a self-initiated expatriate (following the definition of Cerdin and Selmer, 2014); b) to be currently living in Porto; c) to be working in a qualified job; and d) having no precise date for the return, though living temporarily in the country. To target the participants, diverse approaches were used such as through social contacts, snowball sampling and social media groups.

Following the advice from Hippler and Maike (2016) on having a rigorous sample, no professionals following an academic career participated in the study, nor individuals who had pursued study purposes for moving, due to the fact that academics and students benefit from the link to an institution which gives them an edge in getting a visa or dealing with the required paperwork (Hippler & Maike, 2016). In addition, none of the participants had any local ancestors nor shared the language of the host-country as mother tongue.

A total of thirteen people were interviewed from ten different countries, although only two were not from the European Union (USA and Russia). Interviews were conducted between June and July 2016, ten in person and three through Skype. All interviews were conducted in English, were voice-recorded upon verbal authorization of the participants, and later transcribed. The average duration of the interviews was 41 minutes.

3.2. Interview guide

The script of the interview was designed as follows: (1) brief introduction of the study; (2) demographic data; (3) motives to move to Portugal; (4) experiences along the adjustment process; (5) thoughts of moving back to the home-country; and (6) perceived competences required to adjust when self-initiating an assignment. The purpose of this structure was to obtain from the interviewees their personal experiences and the challenges and thoughts they had when moving to Portugal to, later on, identify the main coping strategies.

3.3. Participants

Overall, thirteen participants were interviewed. Three of the interviews were conducted via skype due to location constraints at the moment, while the others were conducted face-to-face. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic data.

Table 1

	Name	Gender	Age	Home-Country	Occupation
Interview 1	Merike	Female	35	Finland	International Business Assistant
Interview 2	Maria	Female	30	Russia / Germany	Account Manager
Interview 3	Elina	Female	28	Latvia	Sales Manager
Interview 4	Sarah	Female	30	Germany	Dentist
Interview 5	Ruud	Male	28	Netherlands	Illustrator
Interview 6	Raul	Male	30	USA	Teacher
Interview 7	Sandra	Female	31	Austria	Quality Manager
Interview 8	Chiara	Female	29	Italy	Software Engineer
Interview 9	Lynn	Female	54	USA	Graphic Designer
Interview 10	Maria P	Female	34	Russia	Customer Service Advisor/Teacher
Interview 11	James	Male	35	Malta	Psychologist
Interview 12	Panda	Female	33	Netherlands	Art Researcher
Interview 13	BethAnne	Female	30	USA	Customer Support

The sample was dominated by female interviewees. The participants' age ranged from 28 to 54 years with an average of 32.8 years old. Overall, 9 participants come from another

European country, while one participant was from Russia and the other three were from the US. With the exception of a couple, all others expatriated alone. Out of the thirteen participants three were married but only one have expatriated together to the host-country. The other married couples mentioned a relationship with a local partner being part of the reasons to move to Portugal. Regarding the time they have been in Porto, the shortest time was 3 months and the longest 23 years. Nevertheless, the three interviewees who have been living in Porto for more than five years assured that at the time of the move they had no intentions to stay for so long. During the interview, they were asked to answer the questions bearing in mind the first years in the host-country.

3.4. Data analysis

Content analysis was the technique used in order to get an accurate interpretation of the data and looking to obtain information about the participants and their contexts through their answers (Bardin, 1977). All interviews were transcribed and coded following the procedures of thematic content analysis and using the support of the software QSR Nvivo 11. To begin the analysis, tree nodes were created based on the structure of the interview script and through the coding process more nodes were created according to the themes that emerged from the interviews. A final examination of the data led to some nodes reorganization and clustering for a better understanding of the results. Upon finalizing the coding process, quotes were extracted from the interviews and included in the results section to better illustrate the main findings.

4. Research findings

The results from the analysis are herein presented following the research questions:

1. What are the main reasons why SIEs decided to come to Porto?
2. How was the SIEs' adjustment process when moving to Porto?
3. What are the SIEs' intentions as to returning home?
4. What are the competencies required to adjust to the host-country?

4.1. Decision to move to Porto

Based on the first research question the study aimed to understand the motives for SIE to move to Portugal. To get a wider view of the decision making, several aspects were asked, such as previous visits to the city/country, local friends and earlier international experiences, among others. Table 2 sums the reasons for moving to Porto.

Table 2 - Decision making of moving to Porto

Decision to move to Porto				
			References	Sources
Why?	Adventure		6	6
	Previous trips to Portugal		6	6
	Wanted something new		6	4
	Partner		5	4
	Found new job		5	3
	Meteo-geographical location		4	4
	Learning new languages		3	3
	Cheap		2	2
	People's energy		2	2
	Quality of life		2	2
	Connections		1	1
	Feel interest in Portugal		1	1
	Intercultural family		1	1
	Liked living abroad		1	1
	Previous job interest		1	1
	Travelling		1	1
	Total		47	
Been there before?	No. of times	Never	5	5
		Once	5	5
		More than once	3	3

Decision to move to Porto				
			References	Sources
		Total	13	
	Reason	Fun – holidays	3	3
		Visiting partner	3	3
		Erasmus	2	2
		Portuguese course	1	1
		Total	9	
	Total		22	
Job finding?	Before moving		7	7
	After moving		4	4
	Freelance		4	4
	Total		15	
Local acquaintances?	Partner		5	5
	Friends		3	3
	None		3	3
	Work contacts		3	3
	Acquaintances		2	2
	By Reference		1	1
	Total		17	
Knowing the local language?	No		10	10
	Yes		3	3
	Total		13	
Leaving home?	Hard to leave	Friends	1	4
		Leaving the country	1	
		Not being sure	1	
		Past bad experiences	1	
		Previous life	1	
		Start over professionally	1	
		Total	6	
	Not hard to leave	Wanted to	10	13
		Done it before	4	
		Had a job	4	
		Looking for a change	4	
		Connected to home-country	2	
		Needed a job	2	
		Didn't plan it	1	
		Give it a try	1	
	Total	28		
Total		34		
Previous international experience?	Yes		13	10
	No		3	3
	Total		16	
How long in Portugal?	1-3 years		5	5
	Less than a year		4	4
	More than 5 years		3	3
	3-5 years		1	1
	Total		13	
Total			177	

As shown, the reason why SIEs decided to move to Portugal is not attached to just one single aspect, but a combination of motives. The sense of adventure and the will to find something new is present in the answers of six out of the 13 participants as one of the reasons why they decided to move out of their home-country. In addition, other four arguments top the main motivations, such as: earlier visits (mentioned by six participants), having found a job or a Portuguese partner (mentioned respectively by five out of 13 respondents) and the attractiveness of the destination. The following statements illustrate these four main factors:

Previous visits to Portugal	<i>Well, I had been here on holidays last summer and I really liked the city so I decided that I wanted to live here so I searched for a job just to live here; I fell in love with the city. (Female SIE from Italy, displaced for 8 months)</i>
Having found a job in the country	<i>...but in the end what I decided, I mean, I applied for a few jobs in various countries, and in the end what decided was the fact that I got an opportunity over here. (Male SIE from Malta, displaced for 1 year and a half)</i>
Having a Portuguese partner	<i>I decided to move to Portugal because my boyfriend is Portuguese and I didn't want to stay in Austria anymore because I knew as soon as I finished my studies I knew I wanted to have a new job anyways, I was looking for a new job to do and he had just changed his job so for me it was clear that I was going to move to Portugal. (Female SIE from Austria, displaced for 1 year)</i>
Meteo-geographical location	<i>I had never lived near the ocean before, all of that so it was pretty much just like "I have to do something, there is nowhere in particular where I have to go, or anything I have to do, so I'm just going to try this interesting country out". (Female SIE from USA, displaced for 5 years and a half)</i>

Table 3 – Statements illustrating the reason why SIEs moved to Porto

Regarding previous trips to Portugal, the majority of the sample had been to Porto at least once (61.5%), having been in the city for holidays, for study purposes, or visiting a partner. More than half of the sample (53.8%) found a job before moving to Porto and in these cases it was possible to identify that the job factor played two roles: was a reason to move or the way to move. Some of the interviewees stated that they had not really chosen the destination but it was the fact that they found a job in Porto that made them move, whereas other participants said they first wanted to move so they started looking for a job to support the decision. Some SIEs (31.8%) had only found a job after moving to Porto, which is mostly related to the fact of having a local partner. In addition, there were SIE's that decided to move

without a job but having freelance work in their fields which allowed them either to live from it or to maintain themselves until finding another job.

Concerning local connections, part of the sample (eight out of thirteen) had current or former partners who were from the host-country and participants who had been in the country before, so the connections were built from earlier friendships. Besides that, there were references to acquaintances, work related contacts and friends of friends who SIEs had reached at one point to ask for advice. Only 23% of the respondents stated that they did not know anyone in the host-country before moving. In addition, 76.9% of the participants didn't know the local language when moving.

When asked about the difficulty on leaving their home-country, even though some of the participants mentioned the hardship of leaving their previous life added to the uncertainty of a new life, all of them voiced it was not as hard as it could be because it was something they aimed for as they were looking for a change: *"I had been planning for a really long time, so I was ready to leave, and also I've been wanting this for a long time"* (Female SIE from Austria, displaced for 1 year). Given that 76.9% of the sample had had previous international experiences before moving to Porto, this was also reported as relevant as well as the certainty of having a job: *"in a way it wasn't hard at all because it's not my first time to be abroad so I knew what to expect"* (Female SIE from Finland, displaced for 10 months).

4.2. Adjustment process

The second research question aimed to know how was the process of adjusting, including anticipatory adjustment and in-country adjustment. To run the analysis, the three categories of adjustment (work, interaction and general) from Black et al. (1991) were used and the main findings are summarized accordingly.

Overall, the findings assisted in the understanding of the most challenging aspects of moving and how SIEs felt while dealing with them. Throughout the statements given by the participants, it was possible to identify the main coping strategies used to diminish the impact

of the stressful situations and to overcome the challenges that come with the moving, by associating the general responses described in the situations with the definitions of each coping strategy, which are shown in Figure 3. Among the most common coping strategies identified in the adjustment process are: *self-reliance, information seeking, support seeking, problem solving, accommodation, negotiation, helplessness and opposition.*

Table 4 – Anticipatory adjustment

Adjustment process						
			References	Sources		
Anticipatory Adjustment	How was the preparation?	No planning		13	8	
		Planning to arrive		9	5	
		Dealing with previous life		8	3	
		Thing to bring		5	4	
		Contacting Locals/Expats		4	4	
		Being confident		3	2	
		Total		42		
	Gathering information?	Yes		7	6	
		Total		7		
		No	Live it		4	3
			Been here before		3	2
			Friends		2	2
			Confidence		1	1
			Hard to find online		1	1
			Language barrier		1	1
			Low expectations		1	1
			Needed the money		1	1
			Previous experience		1	1
			Under a program		1	1
		Total		16		
		Total		23		
	Work Requirements?	Work visa requirements		5	3	
		Citizenship		1	1	
		Enough salary		1	1	
		How to commute		1	1	
		Place to work		1	1	
		Total		9		
	Booking temporary accommodation?	Yes		7	7	
		No		4	3	
		Total		11		
Total			85			

a) Anticipatory adjustment

When asked about the preparation process, the majority of the sample did not feel they had done much planning. Two main reasons were found to influence the feeling: short time notice and having already moved out from the home-country, as follows:

“I think I got to know this on the 17th of December and I started on the 11th of January so I moved quite quickly. I think three weeks was too short for me to prepare for such a big step” (Female SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 6 months),

“(...) In terms of moving, like I said I was already traveling through Europe so it's not like I had a bunch of stuff, like furniture that I had to move from one place to the other or anything like that, I don't know, family members I need to worry about, nothing like that... (...) I would just show up with my suitcase” (Female SIE from USA, displaced for 5 years and a half).

Despite this feeling, results showed that SIEs did try to sort out the basics when arriving, such as finding a temporary accommodation for the least and finding ways to move around the city. There was also interest on getting in touch with other expatriates or locals who could give some advice. In addition, as part of their preparation process before moving, there were references to dealing with “the life that was being left behind”, such as the termination of a house contract, selling or giving things away and saying good-byes. It was also possible to identify the interest of SIEs to make sure they were bringing their necessary belongings to the host-country, including the paperwork they may require while living there.

Internet appears to be the main source of information for SIEs to get an idea of where they were heading to, but the majority of the sample declared not really gathering information mainly because they rather live the experience than plan it: *“I didn't inform myself that much about Porto because I wanted it to be, like I go there and see what it is”* (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 1 year). Furthermore, not feeling the need to find out more about the destination was due to the fact that some of them had been in the host-country before or that they had friends to rely on when arriving. On the other hand, it was stated that there was a difficulty to find out information before moving due to the lack of information available

online or because of the language barrier: *“it was really hard to find any information online it was hard to get email responses, we couldn't call people because we couldn't be sure they spoke English...”* (Male SIE from Malta, displaced for 1 year and a half).

Regarding work requirements there were not many references because most respondents were European citizens. The remaining, who could not benefit from the advantages of the European Union, mainly mentioned the requirement to get a work-visa authorization upon arrival. In terms of accommodation, most of the interviewees declared they had booked a place to stay for the first days while finding a permanent place. Some others stayed at their partner's house or at a friend's place.

Information seeking appears to be one of the most common coping strategies present in anticipatory adjustment; involving the intention of planning where to arrive, things to bring and the minimal requirements needed, information seeking strategy is used to gain meaning about the environment to plan for the move and reduce the uncertainty. This strategy also allows SIEs to get an idea on what to expect regarding challenging situations and prepare themselves to deal with these events. Despite not knowing how to solve them, the information gives them an anticipated notion on what is about to come and reduces the impact of the stressful situation.

However, results also showed that when trying to reach for information, it was not always available or possible to find answers before the actual moving. This situation led SIEs not to focus on the actual planning, but to use a different coping strategy to fight the natural anxiety of not knowing what to expect or having the control. Helplessness strategy was identified when planning their relocation in face of not knowing what to expect or how to deal with a challenge before the moving, such as not having a contract or a place to live. Due to not being able to find a permanent residence before moving or not being able to overcome the language barrier to find one helplessness appeared as a first strategy to deal with the unexpected and even overwhelming conditions that are associated to housing. Nevertheless, problem-solving strategy seems to take over after helplessness due to high importance of dealing with housing, being one of the first concerns when moving to a new place.

Table 5 - General Adjustment

Adjustment process				
			References	Sources
General Adjustment	Feelings when first arrived?	Negative	23	9
		Positive	14	8
		Total	37	
	First impressions when arrived	Positive	10	6
		Different	6	4
		Negative	3	2
		Total	19	
	Unpleasant Situations	Bureaucracy related	18	9
		Culture related	17	7
		Work related	6	5
		Accommodation related	5	3
		Health related	4	4
		Total	50	
	Dealing with difficult situations	Friends support	2	2
		Confronting it	2	1
		Praying	2	1
		Filling complaints	1	1
		Finding people in same situation	1	1
		Talking about it	1	1
		Total	9	
	Bureaucratic/Administrative processes	Inefficient	11	5
		Disorganized	8	6
		Language barrier	8	5
		No information	8	4
		Dependent on other people	7	6
		Different for foreigners	4	4
		Nice people	2	2
		All about connections	1	1
		Total	49	
	Happiness/Life satisfaction	Yes	15	13
		No	0	0
		Total	15	
	Feeling at home	Yes	11	9
		Total		11
		No	Hard to make friends	4
			Not belonging	1
			Life behind	2
			Not knowing the language	1
		Total		9
			Immediately	4

Adjustment process					
				References	Sources
		How long did it take	Still ongoing	3	2
			Up to 6 months	2	2
			6 months to a year	1	1
			1-2 years	1	1
			More than 2 years	1	1
		Total		12	
		Total		32	
	Accommodation for a living	Online		3	3
		Not easy to find		3	2
		Friends		2	2
		Feeling more comfortable		2	2
		Colleagues		1	1
		Newspaper		1	1
		State Agency		1	1
		Total		13	
	Medical assistance	Not enough Information		6	5
		Total		6	
		Where to go	Health center	9	7
			Emergency room	4	3
			Private hospital	2	2
			Back in home-country	1	1
			Total		16
		Impressions	Confusing	7	4
			Hard to communicate	6	4
			Nice people	3	2
			Not taking it serious	2	2
			All about contacts	1	1
			Possible in English	1	1
		Total		20	
		Total		42	
	Local Displacements	Good		15	12
		Need for more information		4	4
		Walkable city		4	4
		Unsafe for bikes		3	3
		Inefficient		3	2
		Total		29	
	Total				295

b) General adjustment

The feelings experienced by SIE's when first arrived were categorized under positive feelings and negative feelings, being both categories almost balanced by the same number of sources but not by the number of references. Overall, positive first feelings were very homogeneous, expressing happiness, excitement and the feeling of belonging. Negative first feelings had different causes, such as weather expectations, loneliness and the need to make friends, and being overwhelmed with the changes. The following statements illustrate some these feelings.

Feelings when first arrived	Positive	<i>I was very glad, very happy. I had finally made It here, so I was very glad ... it was kind of like I just flopped, I was dropped in there and I was on my place. (Female SIE from Finland, displaced for 10 months)</i>
		<i>Excited, I was very excited about, I don't know, integrating into a new city, meeting new people... Like the week after I started exploring the city and I love every bit of it, I love every day of it, like even walking to work, which is like half an hour walk for me (Male SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 3 months)</i>
	Negative	<i>Very soon I understood that even though I had my team and my boss I was still very lonely and alone really. Which was in a way a good thing because I had to straight away make my way to meet people and make friends and get around. (Female SIE from Finland, displaced for 10 months)</i>
		<i>At the beginning it felt like a big challenge for me being in Porto, Portugal; I'm a vegetarian and I don't eat fish either so I was like "oh, what am I going to do?", and also the language is very hard for me, so I was like "Am I really doing this? I can't really go back, I'm not very sure what I'm doing". (Female SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 6 months)</i>

Table 6 – Statements illustrating feelings when first arrived

Regarding SIEs first impressions when moving to Porto, positive first impressions were more commonly expressing satisfaction related to the city look and the living conditions. On the other hand, negative first impressions were less common and were mainly attached to social differences and concerns about the city safety. When mentioning first impressions, there were several references, not positive nor negative, regarding the

differences between home and host-countries, differences associated to processes and looks, as illustrated in Table 7.

First Impressions when arrived	Positive	<i>So I remember the first time I came from Vigo to Porto, I stayed with someone in 'Couch surfing' and I was impacted because I came out from the bus in Aliados and that square is very beautiful, especially because Vigo is not the most beautiful city. I think, so in comparison I was like "Wow, this is the Europe I was thinking of" (Male SIE from USA, displaced for 3 years)</i>
	Negative	<i>I remember especially those first days, but it could also be because I had to go to Finanças and all those kind of offices and I saw all those people that were unemployed and they were just sitting in the streets and who were sad and that hurt me a lot, I was sad about it because you could feel despair and it was very sad (Female SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 6 months)</i>
	Different	<i>First it was like, visually of course people are different than from Latvia. First, they are darker and shorter; then, I had this thing which is kind of more positive, because before I had interaction with Portuguese, I was also expecting for them to be these very loud as Italian and Spanish, but I noticed that they are a bit calmer, as I have seen (Female SIE from Latvia, displaced for 4 years)</i> <i>So these things, cultural differences they really... the trees are different, everything is different the air is different, water is different, it's another world (Female SIE from Russia, displaced for 10 years)</i>

Table 7 – Statements illustrating first impressions when arrived

When questioned about the most unpleasant situations experienced during the first months living in Porto, 92.3% of the sample came up with at least one story to share. A total of 25 categories were created and were classified into five groups according to the main topic it referred to. The most common unpleasant situations were related to bureaucratic processes or cultural differences having 69.2% and 53.8% of the sample dealt with these situations respectively. Table 8 illustrates these aspects:

Unpleasant Accommodation	Deposit	<i>The flats, the housing is quite different, don't know if that counts. Winters are horrible, there is no isolation and basically when you come here is nothing you think of, because you visit the place in summer when I came, and it's warm and there is just no imagination of how cold and humid and unpleasant it can get during winter, and electricity is also</i>
	Finding a place	
	Housing conditions	

Bureaucracy related	Not having a place	<i>very expensive here, so these are things to consider, I think at the beginning (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 1 year)</i>
	Getting work authorization	<i>I did the research of what I needed for a work visa and it's quite complicated because the company has to try to hire a European first and a Portuguese first and also they have to give you a contract that most... like, teachers don't get this kind of contracts, especially in Portugal everybody is getting recibos verdes so in order to get a work visa you have to get a contract and most language schools don't give this kind of contract, so that is complicated as well. So it's like if you want to move and have a work visa without a traditional contracted job is quite</i>
	Migration office	<i>complicated, I think, or without like, I don't know how much money you need for the golden visa, you know, to buy some fancy house or something (Male SIE from USA, displaced for 3 years).</i>
	No information	
	Recognition of studies	
	Registering address	<i>Then, doing the taxes as someone who lives here, that was a lot more difficult because the entire website is set in Portuguese and is set up on JavaScript so you can't even google translate it. There is the thing that you don't know how the Portuguese tax system works in the first place, so it's overwhelming; this is why it cost me like two weeks of delay of registering on the website, getting a password, then resetting the password, losing access again, and basically I had to ask my colleague to help me with that because everything was in Portuguese and... I'm not expecting it to be in English but this type of thing, for example we had from work a meeting with HR and she said "yeah, you have to register and then everything is really simple", which is actually not true because you have so many things to do (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 1 year).</i>
	Registering company	
	Dealing with taxes	
Culture related	Visa	
	Different approaches	<i>One was before in one of the apartments that I tried to hire, I know that there was some manipulation because I'm foreigner and I might not know the system, so they charged me more; I know it's not what they should charge. They were trying to use this that I'm foreigner, you know, so maybe I don't know your system so they tried to take advantage of this possible lack of experience or knowledge (Female SIE from Latvia, displaced for 4 years).</i>
	Discrimination	
	Driving	
	Harassment	
	Personal contact	<i>Punctuality it's still an issue, their lack of organization it's still an issue, the thing that people say they would do and they never do, and they say "I will call you at 2" they, you know, they specify the hour but they never call you at this hour and I don't understand that still because if you are not going to call at 2, tell me "I will call you in the afternoon" why do they specify the hour? (Female SIE from Russia, displaced for 10 years)</i>
	Punctuality	
	Taking advantage	

Health related	Being sick	<i>And then we went to the consultation and since it's a teaching hospital there was a mandatory consultation with a psychologist and the psychologist was a woman and there was a student there, male student and I'm not comfortable being with male doctors and she asked me whether I minded and I said "I mind and I would like him to leave" and she looked at me like you can't imagine, I think nobody had ever asked her that, but it was ok, he laughed. And then we went out of the hospital and I was insisting to my husband we need to make a complaint because this is not the way to treat people and he said "nobody writes a complaint here" (Female SIE from Russia, displaced for 10 years).</i>
	Medical attention	
Work related	Terrible boss	<i>They took forever to write the contract and then they wanted me to start right away. I actually moved here without the contract. (Male SIE from Malta, displaced for 1 year and a half)</i>
	Wage	
	Work contract	<i>My first job it was also an ad in the newspaper, it was an awful job it was the worst job I've had in my life. I was traumatized, I worked there for almost 4 years as well and after that I said that I would never work in a Portuguese company ever again. The company was very small, it was run by an elderly man who founded it and he was like the worst employer that you can ever imagine; he was rude, he treated people really bad, he was unpleasant, he never treated me directly bad because I gave a lot of money for the company and he was afraid to lose me, but it was awful, I had never seen such a bad mannered, rude, mean person in my life, and it really traumatized me that it came to a point that my husband said "just quit the job" because I was getting crazy (Female SIE from Russia, displaced for 10 years)</i>
	Work integration	

Table 8 – Statements illustrating unpleasant situations

Under uncomfortable situations there were direct references to dealing with that by confronting the situation and by looking for friends support or people who had gone through the same. Overall, bureaucratic and administrative processes turned out to be one of the things SIEs struggled the most due to the lack of information on how things worked, the language barrier existent when going to public offices that led to depend on someone else for guidance and translation, plus the perceived inefficiency and disorganization of the system as many interviewees experienced mistakes, different answers for the same procedure and felt being treated differently for being foreigners.

Despite all these difficulties when asked about being happy living in Porto, 100% of the sample declared to be happy with their decision of moving and their current situation. *“Yes, I have absolutely no regrets. I'm, like I said, so much happier now than I was before and I think that the holiday feeling of course has a lot to do, you just feel happier, the sun is shining and you can go to the beach or to the riverside and just see happy tourists and stuff and it makes you feel happy as well”* (Male SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 3 months).

In terms of feeling at home, 69.2% of the interviewees declared to feel at home living in Porto, while the rest of the sample stated that even though they were happy and felt comfortable with aspects of their life in the host-country, that feeling was still ongoing or that there were some factors missing to feel it completely. The cons were mainly attributed to being hard to make friends and to the feeling of not belonging, keeping in mind the life left behind: *“Oh that's a difficult one. No, I feel like a stranger, I'm noticing that I've picked up some Portuguese traits but I do feel that I'm not from there. I know the way, in a low level talk to people so I think that's good, but I think I need a little bit more time to feel at home, maybe more friends will help”* (Female SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 6 months).

Finding a permanent accommodation was mainly arranged when in Porto, mostly through friend's or colleague's recommendations. Different interviewees agreed that it was quite difficult to find information for a permanent residence online due to not being able to communicate in Portuguese and not knowing where to look: *“People had told me "it will be really easy to find a house" and then it was not true. Then I think I found a house that I could rent for February, for the whole month which had a bit more space but it was hard to find a house because I didn't speak Portuguese yet so if I would call people would hang up the phone a lot, they would just be confused and just hang up even if I spoke Spanish or if I tried to speak Portuguese”* (Female SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 6 months).

Regarding medical services when needed, it was brought up that there are no clear instructions on how to get medical assistance when being a foreigner. Even though nationals from European union countries know that they could be covered by the health system of their own country in case of emergency, for most there was no clear information on how to get a medical appointment: *“like knowing what you're supposed to do, signing up for the health*

system and you know, making the appointments it's a little bit sort of bewildering at times” (Female SIE from USA, displaced for 23 years). Despite the initial lack of information, 76.9% of the sample stated they had already attended the health center and even an emergency room when required. Even though there were references concerning the nice people working for the health services and how it was possible to communicate in English, there were even more references on how confusing the whole process was and how there is still a language barrier: *“It was scary. I had really bad luck and I had a big accident just two days after my wallet got stolen so I didn't have my medical insurance cards, nor any money, nor any identification so I was really scared and I didn't know really what to do. They didn't really speak English and I was just there with my dictionary trying to explain but it is difficult because you can't really tell what's going on. The doctor didn't speak English either which I also found very frustrating”* (Female SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 6 months).

About local displacements, 92.3% of the sample agreed that it was easy to move around the city, either by car or by metro, which they consider an easy way to commute to work and to get around the city. There were also some positive references about the walkability of the city and how that had some impact on life satisfaction: *“...you can't use this measurements [salary] from one country to another, you should yeah, learn to measure life satisfaction in other ways, I would say, like the walkability of the city, like how much time you have, how stressed you feel and I think that connects to why I said I felt very happy”* (Male SIE from USA, displaced for 3 years). On the other hand, there were also some negative references to the driving culture in the city and to how inefficient the public transportation can be, particularly regarding the bus system, which appears to be a mystery: *“the buses, you know, you never know when they are going to come”* (Male SIE from USA, displaced for 3 years).

Referring to in-country general adjustment, self-reliance was the dominant coping strategy when dealing with the negative feelings when first arrived to Porto. Focusing on the decision made and appealing to the confidence that made them decide to move is actually what helped SIEs overcome those initial negative feelings. Even though first negative impressions were not predominant, the references to the differences between home and host-

countries led to identify *negotiation* as a coping strategy used to balance what SIEs were used to, with what they were facing upon arrival. This strategy led to the conciliation of the idea of having different ways to do things and the understanding of a different reality.

Helplessness strategy appears to be also present in challenges related to bureaucracy as the first way to deal with such situations; facing the struggles of getting things done plus the language barrier not only generates confusion but also discouragement. This strategy later on is followed by *information* and *support seeking* coping strategies trying to make sense of the situation and figure out what is the right way to do it, either by identifying a clear source or by appealing to someone who could give some advice. Depending on how successful those strategies are, they will be replaced by either problem-solving to obtain results or delegating when no understanding has been made and it just relays on others to solve the difficulties.

When facing uncomfortable situations related to culture it was possible to identify *opposition* as the first coping strategy when dealing with differences that are perceived as not making sense for the newcomers. The driving and discrimination exposed in the results immediately trigger opposition until it developed into *accommodation* or *negotiation*. Other situations such as personal contact and punctuality can lead to applying the negotiation strategy right from the start.

In health related cases, *helplessness* and *opposition* were the first reactions to deal with the frustration produced by such situations, but due to the necessity of finding solutions the coping strategies evolved to *information seeking* regarding what to do and *accommodation* to accept the system in order to solve the situation as soon as possible. Results also reveal a case of *isolation* as a coping strategy to deal with the stress caused by not knowing what to do or where to get information. Another coping strategy identified when dealing with health issues was *escaping*, that is procrastinating or avoiding such situations, to diminish the uncertainty and the stress created by having to adjust to an unknown system.

Table 9 – Interaction adjustment

Adjustment process					
				References	Sources
Interaction Adjustment	First feelings when interacting	Want to meet people		4	4
		Welcome		4	3
		Comfortable		3	2
		Uncomfortable		2	2
		Missing out things		1	1
		Nice feeling		1	1
		Total		15	
	First impressions when interacting	Positive	Friendly	15	9
			Speak English	6	4
			Easy-going	5	4
			Helpful	4	3
			Relaxed	2	1
			Total	32	
		Negative	Hard to make friends	9	7
			Being closed	4	2
			Discrimination	3	3
			All about contacts	1	1
			Total	17	
		Total		49	
	Local communication	Willing to speak local language		8	8
		Hard to have a deep talk		7	6
		Not total comprehension		6	6
		Easy in English		6	5
		Switching to English		3	3
		Being shy		3	2
		Avoid interaction		2	2
		Total		35	
	Language learning	Taking classes		10	8
		Hard to learn		5	3
		Self-learning		4	4
		Want to learn more		4	3
		At work		2	2
		Total		25	
	Best friends	International people		12	9
		Friends from work		9	7
		Local friends		7	6
		Partner		5	5
		People from the same country		2	2
		Sports partners		2	2
		Bible study		1	1
		Total		38	
	Main source of information	Colleagues-Supervisor		6	6
		Internet		6	5
		Friends		4	4
		Partner		3	3
		Acquaintances		1	1
		Landlord		1	1

	Frequency of socializing	Total	21	
		2-3 times a week	6	6
		Not often	4	3
		Every day	2	2
		Every second day	2	2
		Once a week	1	1
		Total	15	
	Free time activities	Going out with friends	13	11
		Sports	8	7
		Beach	7	6
		Studies	3	3
		Travel	3	2
		Walk around the city	2	2
		Total	36	
	Visiting home-country	Once a year	6	6
		Twice a year	6	6
		More than 4 times a year	1	1
		Total	13	
	Home-sickness	No	20	10
		Yes	4	3
		Total	24	
	Total		271	

c) Interaction Adjustment

Regarding interaction adjustment, the first feelings when interacting with locals were mostly positive. Interviewees made allusions to feeling welcome, comfortable while talking to people and felt the need to meet more people and make friends.

A different thing happened with first impressions when interacting, being possible to identify balanced positive references and negative references. When arriving, SIEs agreed that interacting with locals was very easy, considering them very friendly, easy-going and willing to help. In addition to this, references to locals speaking English were made and considered to be positive making smaller the gap of communication and allowing the newcomers to feel more comfortable: *“I have to say that people here are speaking quite a fair amount of English so, I mean, even if I go somewhere and order something or go into de supermarket, you kind of get along with little English and they will understand”* (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 1 year). The negative references were mentioned after the positive as part of the chain of thought of the interviewees who highlighted that it was still hard to actually make friends with locals, perceived to be somehow closed when socializing.

Furthermore, negative first impressions references were related to manifestations and behaviors of discrimination.

Negative first impressions when interacting		<i>“I thought in the beginning it would be easy to get some friends, to know them and that they are really warm, but actually pretty soon I understood that it was actually pretty hard to get to know them and specially to make friends with girls, female friends, I’ve found it harder than meeting guys”</i> (Female SIE from Finland, displaced for 10 months).
	Hard to make friends	
		<i>“I don't know. I do think Portuguese people can be a little less open to newcomers, I think... But I think that if you are making friends with Portuguese people to actually, like, let you into their group it's more difficult specially if you don't speak the language”</i> (Male SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 3 months).
	Discrimination	<i>“In the beginning we did notice a lot of racism at Estrangeiros, like we walked in and there were other people waiting there who were minorities, and they would always call us to the front and sort of ignore the other people; that wasn't very good”</i> (Female SIE from USA, displaced for 23 years).

Table 10 – Statements illustrating negative first impressions when interacting

In terms of local communication, all references were related to the language constraints SIEs had when not knowing Portuguese. Even though 61.5% of the sample expressed their interest on making an effort to speak the local language, it was constantly a struggle to have a deep conversation and there was not full comprehension. Three interviewees expressed their frustration with the fact that when trying to speak Portuguese it was common for people to reply in English, not giving them a chance to actually practice the language, which in the end, made them feel shy and not willing to interact much with locals: *“When I tried to speak Portuguese the first time, they already, they could understand right away that I was no Portuguese and they switched immediately to English without asking and it's like a common thing, at least to me since it has happened a lot of times, but I don't like it very much because I wanted to try my Portuguese”* (Female SIE from Italy, displaced for 8 months). Even though

there were references concerning how hard it was to learn the language, 61.5% of the interviewees had taken language courses, even more than once, to communicate better, and some others were using self-learning methods such as apps and books to start with the basics. It was expressed the desire to learn and practice more, which some of the interviewees were able to do at their work environment and with some local friends: *“just by having to work in a Portuguese environment I learnt more, so I have a lot of bad habits but I can speak well and understand well”* (Female SIE from USA, displaced for 23 years).

When asked about their best friends or whom they spend most of their time, there were, overall, more references related to having more international than local friends. In addition, partners and friends from work were as well commonly mentioned. These two categories were also identified as an important main source of information for SIEs when having doubts or wanting to get by any unknown situation. Internet was as well a common source, not only by *googling* it, but also through social media groups where people might have not only answers but also hints on the best way to get things done: *“you just go online or online communities or just talk to your friends and ask them what would they do in this situation”* (Female SIE from USA, displaced for 23 years).

Most interviewees (76.9%) declared to be socializing outside of work at least once a week, being the most common activities meeting with friends and going out for dinner or drinks. Going to the beach and practicing sports were also very common activities among the interviewees. The other 23.1% that stated not socializing often, reported time limitations mainly work related.

The sample was unified regarding going back to visit home-country, stating they do it once or twice every year, which would usually variate according to short work assignments or having the option to work remotely. There was one respondent who had been back to visit the home-country five times in the eight months she has been living in Porto, which reflects the absence of local meaningful relationships.

In terms of feeling homesick, 23.1% of the sample declared to feel it often, even while they were happy living here: *“there are days that I'm homesick, you know sometimes for*

Germany, not just the US or like when I try to figure out how to make more friends or in terms of certain kind of food or how much easier things would be if I was in the US were I absolutely know the language and I know exactly how things work in general, so I definitely have those moments and even days but in general I'm happy here" (Female SIE from USA, displaced for 5 years and a half). The other 76.9% explained that because they belong to a multicultural family with no single place considered to be home, or because they have been abroad after a long time, they usually do not feel home sick: *"never because I don't even know where I would feel homesick for, I mean I miss my parents or we both miss our families for sure, but it's not connected to a location so much because home was definitely London for us, that's where we lived, that's where we had our children, but it's not where our parents are. So I wouldn't say homesick"* (Male SIE from Malta, displaced for 1 year and a half). Even though there were common references about missing the family and friends, but also *how things work* in the home-country, most agreed that the feeling fades when things start getting into place. Visiting and having people to visit them also make it easier.

In terms of interaction adjustment, even though negative first feelings when interacting were not very common, the references reflected several cultural difference which called for negotiation as a coping strategy trying to balance the difference. Regarding the negative first impressions when interacting, it was possible to identify support seeking as the strategy to cope with perceived closeness and the difficulty to make friends, this by looking to find more people under the same situation, being that one of the reasons why there are such high references to having international best friends or colleagues, and in cases involving a local partner, the time spent with them and their social circle. Furthermore, in what concerns work adjustment, the coping strategies used when looking for a job differed depending on the timing of the search. When still in the home-country, the strategy used was *self-reliance*, making sure about the decision and feeling empowered to be successful; on the other hand, when already in the host-country the main coping strategy was *accommodation* due to the fact that even though the job search might not be equal to the one from the home-country, nor the conditions offered, there is the need to find a job.

In addition, results show how language constraints have a major impact on local communication and interaction adjustment, and based on the references it is possible to identify that a *problem solving* strategy was adopted to cope with the communication difficulties, evidenced by how the majority of the sample decided to take language courses. Even though admitting it also represents a challenge, participants are willing to make this effort to diminish the communication gap that has been affecting their adjustment. The negative first feelings and first impressions when looking for a job were mainly related to language barriers and the fact of being a foreigner, which appealed to the same coping strategy identified in communication, *problem-solving*. Since not knowing the language inhibits SIEs to find a job easily, all the participants but one, who had not found a job before moving took a language course.

Table 11 – Work adjustment

Adjustment process					
				References	Sources
Work Adjustment	How was the process of finding a job	Before arrival	Came for the interview	3	2
			Knew about position	3	2
			Internet	2	2
			Making the decision	2	2
			Contacts	1	1
			Finding a differentiator	1	1
			Finding finance	1	1
			Internship	1	1
			By reference	1	1
			Total	15	
		After arrival	Contacts	5	3
			Check value on the market	3	1
			Different strategy from home-country	2	2
			Problems with paperwork	2	2
			Newspaper	2	1
			Freelance promotion	1	1
			Not many jobs	1	1
			Sending CVs	1	1
			Work remotely	1	1
			Total	18	
		Total		33	

First feelings when looking for a job	Negative		12	5
	Positive		3	3
	Total		15	
First impressions at work	Negative		21	7
	Positive		8	4
	Different		5	3
	Total		34	
Job satisfaction	Not satisfied		21	4
	Satisfied		18	9
	Total		39	
Work environment	Positive	Company cares about you	8	5
		Relaxed	6	6
		Good climate	5	5
		Continuous growing	4	4
		Teamwork	4	4
		Good people	3	3
		Feels like a family	3	2
		Has international people	2	2
		Place to meet new people	2	2
		Work from home	2	2
		Total	39	
	Negative	Difficult management	4	2
		Foreigners vs. locals	4	2
		Utilitarian vision	4	1
		Stressful	3	2
		Gossip	2	1
		Frustration	1	1
		Feeling lonely	1	1
		Need for more communication	1	1
		People leaving	1	1
		Need to push to learn	1	1
		Total	22	
	Total		61	
Job relationships	Where are they from?	Mainly foreigners	6	5
		Mainly locals	5	4
		Total	11	
	Boss / Supervisor	Positive	10	5
		Negative	6	4
		Total	16	
	Colleagues	Positive	21	10
		Negative	11	4
		Total	32	
Total		59		
Support given	Negative	No support	4	1
		Not good guidance	3	2
		No integration	1	1
		Not understanding	1	1

			Total	9	
		Positive	Dealing with paperwork	3	2
			Giving time for travelling	1	1
			Helping with taxes	1	1
			Integration	1	1
			Providing a bike	1	1
			Understanding time difference	1	1
			Total	8	
		Total	17		
Total			258		

d) Work Adjustment

In terms of the process of finding a job, the findings distinguish the SIEs who found a job before or after moving. In both cases, social contacts and knowing about the position through someone were common and effective ways to find a job. Securing a job before moving also involved going to Porto for an interview, finding the money for the move and actually being sure that it was the “right decision”: *“I still needed to make the decision if I wanted to go, and once I made it I started looking for the finances and the day when I went to sign my contract it came a reality”* (Female SIE from Finland, displaced for 10 months). Regarding the SIE’s who looked for a job after arrival, there were several references to the differences from home and the importance of using various strategies to find a job, especially in a country where even locals are having a hard time. In describing this process, it was brought up the difficulty that foreigners had when dealing with the paperwork to gain permission to work: *“I am the only German dentist that was registered in the Order since 30 years, there were no Germans coming at all working here as dentists. So there was a little bit of a problem also with papers, they did not know how to deal with my case because I don't have Bachelor and Master System, I have another system of studies”* (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 2 years and a half).

The first feelings associated to the search for a job were mainly negative. The main restrictions were due to the difficulty of finding a position without knowing the local language and having the need to gain local work experiences after moving. These two

categories were also named about the negatives of the first impressions when looking for a job, with references to the process disorganization: *“last year I applied for a job in Porto at an Illustration studio; the funny thing is that when we had meetings on Skype and stuff, they told me I had it, I had the job, they did, so I was getting really excited, really pumped and I was, you know, looking up everything, thinking how was it going to be and getting really excited. But then after a few months I didn't hear anything from them anymore; I was like... I called them and said "guys, in a few months I'll be there and... how is it going?" and suddenly they were like "we hired someone else". So I didn't see that coming, so then I stayed another half a year in Scotland”* (Male SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 3 months). Positive references were also made regarding how impressed SIEs were when finding not only nice work environments but also good quality in terms of how companies delivered. In addition, references related to how different things worked compared to home-country, mainly referring to time management and informality.

Even though some of the participants stated that there were aspects of their work they did not like, 69.2% of the sample declared to be satisfied with their job based on how happy they felt, on appreciating the company and on being able to keep learning. Concerning the sources of dissatisfaction, the results highlight the absence of professional challenges and the salary. The following tables summarize these issues.

Job satisfaction	Satisfied	<i>“About the things that I do I'm very, very satisfied, especially in this particular moment, you know, when there are some projects to work on and specially now when I have this chance a little bit to travel and in many, many ways I feel happy”</i> (Female SIE from Latvia, displaced for 4 years).
		<i>“I didn't have many expectations, I mean, well it's more than I expected. I mean I didn't expect... the company is very good and I didn't expect it to exist a company like this in Portugal because well, in my area, software engineering”</i> (Female SIE from Italy, displaced for 8 months)
	Not satisfied	<i>“...back then I still had the mindset of "okay, you are there once, you'll have your foot in the door so you can move around a bit more flexible". Yeah, the job now, I did lose a little bit of motivation...”</i> (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 1 year).

“I was saying "Ok, actually I'm not getting so much money and I'm working like a whore, I work a lot, and I'm not learning so much" so I said I want to quit” (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 2 years and a half).

Table 12 – Statements illustrating job satisfaction

When describing the work environment, more positive references were made, mainly related to how relaxed the workplace was, the good climate and the teamwork present, and how SIEs felt the company cared about them on a regular basis: *“They do a lot to keep us happy, so there is fresh food everyday... it's like the little things, it's having like once a week, most of the times Friday, you have special food, and then on Wednesdays in the morning we have either Croissants or cream. Some take this for granted but it's like you come there in the morning and it's a very nice thing to have, you don't have to worry about breakfast that much, there is free coffee even if it's not that great and there is like in summer they do parties, they're trying to join everyone”* (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 2 years and a half). Regarding the negative references, they were mostly related with disliking the management of the company and identifying the workplace as stressful. In addition, it was brought up that when having both, local and international workers, there was a tendency to be divided into groups: *“most of the people there are from Portugal or are Portuguese speakers, so we tend to, even at lunch, because when you want to have lunch instead of the big table with them only speaking in Portuguese, you kind of move away from that to have your own lunch outside because it's simple with your work colleagues from the Account Management from the Partner Services from the Customer Service because they are there more or less as well and don't speak hundred percent, so even if not aware you separate yourself”* (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 1 year).

When asked about work relationships, there were balanced answers regarding the nationality of work colleagues and supervisors: half of the answers described them as mostly locals and the other half as mostly foreigners. In describing the relationship with the supervisor, there were more positive references, such as being understanding and friendly or easy to get along with; whilst the negative references referred to having mainly a virtual

relationship and not finding leadership when needed. About the relationship with colleagues, there were also more positive references than negative, being described as easy to work with, feeling integrated and having good work relations. The negative aspects referred to colleagues being competitive and not feeling integrated, and also describing them as workaholics compared to the way they were used to work in the past.

In terms of the support given by the employing company, the sample was again divided almost by the middle, having the negative references a small predominance. Positive company support included helping to deal with paperwork, helping to integrate and providing the necessary resources; while poor support was attributed to poor or no guidance throughout the relocation process along with a lack of understanding: *“I was actually struggling, because as I said I left on a Thursday Vienna and I started on Tuesday, and I only started on Tuesday only because I begged them not to start on a Monday so that I could go and actually open an account where they could put my salary because I had to do that during daytime. So they were actually not very helpful, they said “ok, you can have a day” and I was like “ok, thank you”, so I had to do all the bureaucratic things in that one day, all in that Monday I had, so no, they were not really helpful about that”* (Female SIE from Austria, displaced for 1 year).

Concerning the work-related situations, the coping strategy mostly applied was *accommodation* as SIEs understood they had no power to change the circumstances, being dependent on the employer. This strategy predominated throughout work related references until it was replaced by *opposition*, with the refusal to accept certain work conditions mentioned by a few SIEs.

Regarding the lack of satisfaction with the job related to, as the results showed, motivation loss and wanting better conditions, the coping strategies present start with *accommodation* when getting used to what the job has to offer, which turns later into helplessness when realizing it's not giving what expected but is still needed for survival. Helplessness strategy can turn into *opposition* when reaching burnout.

When describing the negative perceptions of job relationships, even when not being predominant, it was possible to identify that in case of the supervisor when no leadership or

help is perceived, the strategy used to cope with the situation is problem solving, due to the fact delivering and obtaining results are part every job, even without having the support needed. On the other hand, when related to the colleagues, the negative perceptions concerned mainly the competitiveness and no integration, being self-reliance the strategy identified as helping to cope with the situation due to the reassurance and empowerment given in moments of doubt.

As for the lack of support, especially when moving, throughout the shared experiences it is possible to identify as a first strategy helplessness when not knowing what to do and not finding any answers or someone to rely on and still being in need to deliver. Nevertheless, depending on the circumstances the coping strategy might change to negotiation in order to make sense on why the absence of support.

4.3. Intentions of moving back

To answer the third research question, all interviewees were inquired about the intentions of going back to their home-country or moving somewhere else. Table 4 presents the results obtained.

Table 13 – Intentions of moving back

Intentions of moving back			
		References	Sources
No	Feeling happy	6	5
	Live the moment	6	3
	Work	3	2
	Total	15	
Yes	Family and friends	2	1
	Looking for new experiences	2	1
	Wanting more	1	1
	Total	5	
Total		20	

When asked about intention to move back, 76,9% of the sample declared not having intentions to move back to their home-country or any other country for the moment. They

are generally satisfied with their current life and are enjoying their living conditions. Despite of this, none dismissed the possibility of moving somewhere else in the future, as there was always the possibility of things changing although they were focusing on living the present. In addition, some other references were made connected to the fact of having a job in Porto, which established a specific amount of time that they would need to stay if everything went well, which gave them some base plan for the future.

The other 23.1% of the sample admitted they had in mind the idea of leaving the country and moving either to their home-country or to a place where they had been previously and had some idea of the life conditions. The motives for this statements were organized in three categories. The first one was related to missing friends and families and wanting to go back to be closer to them; family related mainly because of the need from both sides to feel closer, and friends related because it had not been easy to establish friendships while being in Porto. The second category referred to living new experiences and exploring other places, and the third category included the aim of attaining higher work challenges and money, in spite of the worthy living conditions in Porto.

Intentions of moving back	Yes	Family and friends	<i>“Yeah, it's a recent thing, like in the last two months I started thinking about it; not now, but when I first came I hadn't planned at all about going back... The main factor Relationships with people. I don't know, maybe in the meantime I will learn Portuguese so well that I will have the same conversations that I have with Italian people and my friends with Portuguese people so I can make very good friends here and it would be the same, but I don't know” (Female SIE from Italy, displaced for 8 months).</i>
		Looking for new experiences	<i>“Yeah, it's always a question because, and my girlfriend agrees, sometimes we kind of get tired of Porto about the slowness and kind of the age of the buildings and the people, you know, it doesn't feel very dynamic... it's kind of like we want to try living in other places” (Male SIE from USA, displaced for 3 years)</i>
		Wanting more	<i>“It depends because I still haven't found what I really, what my passion is when it comes to work, so it will also depend on that</i>

I guess. Portugal is a beautiful country and, I mean, Porto is amazing and beautiful and has most of the things that one would think or dream of, like I would always have wanted to live by the beach and have lived in a summer country and once you get that, obviously, you do notice that there are certain, there are more things to your happiness than just being in the sun by the beach” (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 1 year).

	Feeling happy	<i>“No. Well, I have thought about it but the conclusion was not to go back. No, I don't want to, at least not for now. I'm not saying that I would never ever do it, but for now I don't see why, I have no reason, I'm happy living here” (Female SIE from Austria, displaced for 1 year)</i>
No	Live the moment	<i>“Well, I know that maybe I can't, like I want to stay here but maybe things will change and I'll need to go back, so I'll enjoy my time here now as I'm here and if things change, then I'll go back. I've learnt to try to live in the moment, not try to think much in the future because it is better to live in the moment” (Female SIE from Finland, displaced for 10 months).</i>
	Work	<i>“Yeah, so we don't want to, we don't have plans to leave, but of course it all depends on work” (Male SIE from Malta, displaced for 1 year and a half).</i>

Table 14 – Statements illustrating intentions of moving back

While some participants revealed the intention to move again, none had concrete plans to actually leave Porto. All were open to consider different options, looking for other opportunities, but there was no specific time to actually do it.

4.4. Required competencies

The fourth research question aimed to understand what were the competencies required for a better adjustment when moving to a new place, based on respondents' personal experience. Table 15 presents the main findings.

Table 15 – Required competencies

Required competencies		
	References	Sources
Open-mindedness	9	5
Flexibility	9	6
Understanding cultural differences	8	5
Holding no expectations	8	6
Courage	5	4
Self-confidence	5	3
Learning the language	4	3
Keeping calm	3	3
Pushing yourself	3	2
Reminding it is a constant learning	2	2
Total	56	

The interviewees came up with different answers that ended up being grouped into ten categories. Open-mindedness was reported as a main competency required to better adjust, reflecting the need of not having fixed ideas and being ready to accept and enjoy things as they come: *“We came with a very open mind because we knew nothing about Portugal and we were like yeah, we took it in and we were ready for that. [...] but if you come here with the sense of adventure and just think “let's see what's different let's explore this country, let's mix with the culture” I think you'll have a completely different experience than if you try to bring Germany into Portugal, it's not going to work”* (Male SIE from Malta, displaced for 1 year and a half).

Flexibility, which was associated to adaptability, referred to going along with what was presented, not fighting the new circumstances but learning to use the resources available. *“I think you have to be flexible and I think the people that I found not settling ell here are the ones that were hoping to find their home here, or like they want things to work as they did wherever, home”* (Male SIE from Malta, displaced for 1 year and a half)

Another relevant competence refers to understanding cultural differences, which meant the assumption of differences between home and host-countries and the inadequacy of comparisons and judgements, as further illustrated: *“I think the most important thing is just*

being, I think trying to understand people's best intentions because a major part of living in a different country is intercultural communication and people speaking different native languages. [...] you won't necessarily will understand everything as someone from that country, and so there can be a lot of misunderstandings and I think every time there is a misunderstanding rather than thinking "that person just doesn't like me" or "how dare they say that" or something like that, you take a step back and say "maybe I'm just not understanding what they're saying or they are not understanding what I'm saying. Let's make a better effort to clarify what's happening and what we are talking about". And not just on a language level either but just in general. I still have to tell myself, but something is just made a certain way here, it's not something personal against me or anything like that, I just have to understand where that person is coming from and where that process is coming from and things like that" (Female SIE from USA, displaced for 5 years and a half).

Holding no expectations was also one of the most mentioned references by participants, suggesting not to create preconceived ideas of what to find or how things are going to be because dealing with built expectations can be even harder than dealing with reality. *"Don't expect too much probably, I think don't have expectations of how your life is going to be; I think if you are more like going with the flow and you're doing it day by day, you are making it easier to yourself other than putting too much pressure on yourself and thinking like "oh my god, I'm going to be her for a year, I should be fluent in Portuguese, I should have this amazing job and earn this amount of money", whatever, because it's probably not going to work so yeah, go easy"* (Female SIE from Austria, displaced for 1 year).

Furthermore, courage was brought up as finding the strength to go for the adventure even without knowing much, not being afraid to look like a fool for not knowing all the answers and asking for help when needed. *"I also think you need to be able to ask for help when you need help, I had to learned that"* (Female SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 6 months).

Self-confidence, which was associated to trusting yourself and the choices made, involved keeping optimistic and believing in the initial vision, in order to not giving much importance to the difficulties. *"You need to believe in what you are doing because otherwise*

it's easier to give up and then you'll miss out in so many opportunities” (Female SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 6 months).

An additional competence referred to learning the language, where the references were linked to the impact that being able to communicate in the local language can have in feeling adapted and integrated by the host-culture. *“I think if you speak the language and are proactive you'll be fine. They are very nice but maybe they are just closed a little bit compared to what I'm used to in the Netherlands or the UK, but over there I speak the language... so I do want to try to learn the language sometime” (Male SIE from Netherlands, displaced for 3 months).*

In addition, keeping calm was brought up as an allusion to how things should be handled when not going the right way; controlling the stress about uncertainty and realizing that despite the fact that things are not always easy, the best way to find solutions is by taking things slowly and looking for solutions without freaking out. *“In the moment I was stressed, I was worried, I didn't know if I would have money for the next month and stuff like that, but you notice after it all happens that things work out ok, so the more you can control your stress and worry and just attempt things, probably the better of you'll be” (Male SIE from USA, displaced for 3 years).*

Pushing yourself was also referred as a competence related to making an effort to go out of the comfort zone and force yourself to be in situations that might not be the easiest in terms of confidence but that can help to surpass the daily obstacles. *“It seems like a funny thing, but It relates about anything, communication, as when I was searching for an apartment, of course it was difficult to call in the foreign language that I don't know perfect, but If I'm not going to try... Now in my apartment I have many troubles so I need to talk to the manager and he doesn't speak English, so whether I will have water coming out there or I wait for him to contact the owner who will then contact me, or I contact him myself and tell him to fix it right now. So I think that since I moved I became more effective, like to get things done faster” (Female SIE from Latvia, displaced for 4 years).*

Reminding it is a constant learning as the final competence was mentioned as exactly that, keeping in mind that there was no possibility to know it all and that there is always more to learn, and to do so there should also be a will to do so. *“I think there is this thing that you are still learning, that you are not getting over it, that it’s a constant process all the time”* (Female SIE from Germany, displaced for 2 years and a half).

5. Discussion

This study aims to identify the coping strategies associated to the adjustment process of self-initiated expatriates living in Porto. Primary data was collected from 13 interviews with SIEs who shared the experience of moving to Porto. In detail, this study explores their motives and their adjustment process. Further, all interviewees were encouraged to describe not only their first ideas and feelings when arrived but also the current ones, with the purpose of identifying the coping strategies that allowed them to obtain a certain level of adjustment when facing the challenges that came along with the moving.

The first research question addresses the reasons why SIEs decided to come to Porto. Understanding which factors might have influenced that decision can assist in further understanding the adjustment process (both anticipatory and in-country).

The main findings about the motives show that in addition to the wish for adventure and exploring new options, having a partner and getting a job in the host-country were motives to relocate. Both can give SIEs the feeling that they can hold on to something even if they do not control or know the other conditions. These findings support earlier research from Selmer and Luring (2012) where *Explorer* and *Architect* reasons to expatriate appear to be the most recurrent, where the sense of adventure and the desire for new career opportunities take the lead when deciding to relocate.

Among the five participants who had never been in Porto before moving, four moved because they had found a job and the other one had a Portuguese partner. While the motive of finding a job gave them an edge, it was not exclusive to make the decision as all four participants stated they were looking for something else and finding the job was the ultimate reason to move to Porto. References related to the partner throughout the interview show the central role he/she had on giving the newcomer an orientation point. This finding supports earlier evidence from Portuguese SIEs (Pinto & Araújo, 2016), thus conforming that SIEs

often move using an “anchor point” and how having host-country national partners influence positively expatriates level of adjustment (Davies, Kraeh & Froese 2015)

Overall, these kind of edges can influence the way each participant deals with the novelty of the moving and have a direct impact on releasing the stress produced by the natural uncertainty of not knowing what will happen, which can be even bigger in the case of Porto, not being this a common destination for international careers.

As for the second research question, about the adjustment process, the results reveal several commonalities among the experiences lived by SIEs in Porto throughout their adjustment process. In terms of anticipatory adjustment, the findings suggest not much planning among SIEs, which is consistent with the findings from Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010) were due to the lack of company support, tasks that could have been part of anticipatory adjustment end up being dealt with after arrival to host-country.

Regarding in-country adjustment, the most challenging aspects related to general adjustment were bureaucratic processes and cultural differences which is consistent with the data from Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010) who stated how finding out about rules and procedures when moving can take some time and how not dealing with it effectively can influence first stages of adjustment. Related to cultural differences, results are also consistent with the findings of Fu, Shaffer and Harrison, (2005) who identify the struggle of SIEs when first relocating due to the lack of understanding of the host-country culture and behaviors.

Concerning interaction adjustment, knowing the local language also showed to have an impact, being local communication one of the most common challenges faced by SIEs in Porto. This finding support earlier research from Peltokorpi (2008) showing that language proficiency catalyzes interaction adjustment as it increases the possibilities to interact with more people and to create connections through communication. Likewise, having previous international experience is perceived as being an advantage in terms of knowing beforehand the existence of the inherent challenges of moving. Participants that had never had a similar experience show to take more time to feel comfortable and satisfied with the mobility. As regards work adjustment, the major challenges faced by SIEs were related to not feeling

satisfied with their role and not feeling as part of a team due to a differentiation between locals and foreigners, which is consistent with Howe-Walsh and Schyns (2010) when referring to the need of clarifying the definition of the position and describing what is expected from them, as a different previous experience could generate negative effects. The use of English in the workplace was identified by Froese, Peltokorpi and Ko (2012) as having a positive influence in expatriates job satisfaction as it reduced the differentiation among employees and permitted a better communication and allowed more efficient socialization.

Overall, eight main coping strategies were identified and were present along the adjustment process: *self-reliance*, *information seeking*, *support seeking*, *problem solving*, *accommodation*, *negotiation*, *helplessness* and *opposition*. Coping strategies such as delegation, isolation and escape were only marginally mentioned. No reference to using submission as a coping strategy was identified.

Despite the stressful situations SIEs went through and the difficulties faced when moving they all reported feeling happy. In addition, most were feeling at home while living in Porto, while the remained regret not having developed stronger social ties thus having the feeling of not belonging.

Consistently with the findings for adjustment, more than half of the participants have no intentions to move back to their home-country, reassuring their satisfaction, enjoyment and stability living in Porto. In the case of the participants with intentions of going back (4 out of 13), only one recognized having problems adjusting with effects over satisfaction and homesickness. Anyway, the intentions to go back were mostly related to the willing to have new experiences and wanting more.

Finally, in answering the last research question, the findings highlight ten required competences that were determinant to adjust better. A further analysis can relate these competences with the coping strategies identified throughout the description of the adjustment process, as follows:

Required competencies	Coping strategies
Courage Self-confidence Keeping calm	Self-reliance
Flexibility No expectations	Accommodation
Learning the language	Information seeking
Open-mindedness Understanding cultural differences	Negotiation
Pushing yourself	Problem solving
Reminding it is a constant learning	Helplessness

Opposition and *Support seeking* were the only coping strategies out of the eight identified throughout the answers that could not be associated to the required competencies suggested by the participants. A reason for this could be explained by how *Opposition* is a coping strategy that uses responses that are negatively perceived such as venting and rejection (Skinner et al., 2003), which might not feel by the participants as competence. Regarding the lack of association in the case of *Support seeking*, Skinner et al. (2003) explain a common perception in which social support might be seen as a part of different coping strategies and not a coping strategy on its own.

As the required competencies were brought up by the participants to help them better throughout the relocation process, being able to associate them with the coping strategies identified throughout their answers suggest that there is an effective influence of coping strategies in their level of adjustment experienced.

5.1 Limitations and implications for future research

The findings presented were obtained based on the experiences of SIEs in Porto and are not aimed to be representative for SIE mobility.

Due to the fact of being focused in descriptions of experiences and insights of moving, the relationship established among the use of coping strategies and adjustment cannot be presented as a permanent correlation. In addition, the sets of coping strategies used when dealing with the unpleasant situations or the negative feelings are not supposed to generate the same results or to be applied in the same order. Furthermore, it was not possible to estimate how long should a coping strategy be used or when it changed.

Since this study did not contrast the coping strategies bearing in mind the origin of the SIEs, further research might explore this feature, being possible, as data suggest, that Europeans faced less problems and therefore mobilized different coping strategies. Future research could also include the perspective of local participants when identifying the coping skills by surveying colleagues, partners and friends of SIEs. The replication of this study in both cosmopolitan and non-cosmopolitan cities could also lead to identify whether certain coping strategies are more used when going from a big city to a smaller one or vice versa.

Moreover, it would be interesting to further examine the experiences of maladjusted SIEs, aiming to identify the coping strategies applied and how do they relate to the adjustment difficulties. Furthermore, a double-view perspective would be intriguing, assessing both, Europeans moving to Latin America and Latin-Americans moving to Europe, in order to explore what are the main challenges for both sides and whether the same coping strategies are used to deal with cultural difference.

5.2. Practical implications

Despite being qualitative and based in a small sample of SIEs living in Porto, the findings of this study have also some practical implications. For managers, understanding the struggle and the stress generated by a self-initiated move, this study identifies the support coping strategies most appreciated by SIEs to diminish the uncertainty experienced before moving. For instance, sharing information about administrative processes and some information about the city before the move and implementing a support system to provide help and information

after the relocation could be provided to the newcomers, being the lack of information and support one of the main challenges faced.

Additional measures could be taken, especially in companies with a big international quota, concerning the creation of politics and culture identity inside the workplace that allow all employees share a common ground. Even though local practices cannot be eliminated, a multicultural management approach looks for harmony among work, people and culture, which can minimize cultural misunderstanding and personal disinterest (Huang, 2016).

For SIEs moving to Porto, this study identifies the most frequent challenges as well as the most useful coping strategies, both before the move and during the stay. For instance, anticipatory preparation, through information seeking is beneficial to minimize the impact upon arrival. Support seeking through social media, even before the arrival, has a positive influence preparing the newcomer to the challenges and gives them a lead on how to deal with them. Negotiation, as to keeping in mind that things are done differently in the host-country, reduces the impact of frustration and allows newcomers to learn how to deal with the challenges. After the move, self-reliance appears to be determinant when facing difficulties, were self-reassurance and confidence in the decision making diminish the negative impact of difficult situations and makes it easier to overcome challenges.

6. Conclusion

This study provided an overview of the experiences lived by SIEs moving and living in a non-cosmopolitan city such as Porto. It examined the motivations to move, the preparation process, first impressions and feelings, main adjustment process and related coping strategies. Also, addressed the competencies required to adjust and SIEs intentions to go back to the home-country. Throughout the descriptions of the vivid experiences of 13 SIEs from very different origins it was possible to recognize the common challenges and stressful situations that SIEs had to deal with when moving, usually associated with the lack of information, language constraints and cultural differences.

The analysis showed that when facing difficulties, SIEs in Porto tend to adopt one or more of the eight coping strategies: self-reliance, support seeking, problem solving, information seeking, accommodation, negotiation, helplessness and opposition. As expected, the use of these coping strategies helped diminish the impact of the stressful situations, but also assisted them in making sense of how things work in the host-country. Life satisfaction and the reported feeling of being at home were the positive outcomes of coping and adjusting to work, interaction and general adjustment. While some adjustment difficulties persisted among some SIEs, these difficulties were not enough to go back home.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

General information

- Where are you from?
- How old are you?
- What is your profession?
- What were you doing before coming to Portugal? Working, studying, unemployed?
- How long have you been in Portugal?

Decision-making

- Why did you decide to move to Portugal?
- Had you been here before?
- Did you find a job before moving to Portugal or only when you arrived?
- Did you have friends or acquaintances in Portugal?
- Did you know the language before moving?
- Was it hard to leave your life behind?
- Had you lived before in a different country, excluding your own?

Anticipatory adjustment

- How was the process of preparing your departure to Portugal?
- How was the process of gathering information about Portugal? (Visit, ask friends, google, Embassy/consulate...)
- Did you look up what were the requirements for working in Portugal?
- Did you start looking for accommodation before moving?

General Adjustment

- How did you feel when you first arrived?

- Do you remember your “first impressions” about the place/country/people?
- What were the most unpleasant things you had to deal with? How have you dealt with them? Could you give some examples?
- How have you found the bureaucratic processes you’ve had to go through? (Visa, NIF, Bills, Bank Account, Health insurance). How have you handle them?
- How happy do you feel presently? Living here?
- Do you feel at home in Portugal? How long did it take for you to feel comfortable living here?
- How did you find where to live?
- Have you required any medical assistance since your arrival? How did you manage to know what to do and where to go?
- Did you find it easy to move around the city?

Interaction Adjustment

- How did you feel about interacting with locals?
- Do you remember your “first impressions” about those interactions?
- Did you find it easy to communicate with locals?
- Did you take some Portuguese classes?
- Who are here your “best friends”? Why? / Where are your friends from? How did you meet them?
- If you have any doubts that you cannot clear up by yourself, where do you usually go to or who do you ask?
- How often do you socialize outside of your work environment?
- What do you do in your free time?
- How often do you visit your home-country?
- How often do you feel homesick?

Work adjustment

- How was the process of finding a job?

- What was your first impression about finding a job?
- How did you feel while looking?
- Are you satisfied with your current job?
- How's the work environment?
- How's the relationship with your work colleagues and supervisors? Can you describe your colleagues? (Age, origin, experience...)
- Did your workplace provide any kind of support or integration when you arrived?

Intentions of moving back

- Have you thought about returning to your home-country before you expected? How often?

Required competencies

- Through your experience, what do you think are the competences that help you when moving to a different place, to deal with all of it?